

Supporting a Vital Resource in Our Community
Council President Scott Peters, First District
For the La Jolla Light, Feb/March 2007

Healthy living and advances in modern medicine allow Americans to live longer and more active lives than ever before in our history. With a growing population of older Americans, it becomes increasingly important to provide a range of services suited to their health and other needs.

For more than 30 years, the Florence Riford Senior Center in La Jolla has provided a range of life-extending services for residents of La Jolla, University City and Pacific Beach. Those services include health and wellness seminars, tax and legal advice, exercise and computer classes and other activities to care for and engage the over-50 population.

The Riford Center currently serves more than 400 members each year, ranging in age from 50 to 90-plus. Since 2004, the center's membership has grown more than 475% and that number is expected to grow significantly more in the future.

Initial funding was provided by philanthropist Florence Riford, who purchased the facility in 1972. Since that time, resources have dwindled, with the Center expected to have spent 80% of its remaining funds by 2008. Although a maintenance fund was part of Mrs. Riford's bequest, the endowment has not been able to keep up with the rising costs of operating the center. Maintenance has been deferred so that more money can be spent on programming and activities for seniors. The facility operates on a modest budget, with only two part-time and two full-time professional staffers, and a dedicated group of volunteers. To save money on operating costs, the Center closes on Fridays. Without new funding, the Center will be confronted with a severe financial crisis and a doubtful future.

We must make sure that the Riford Center continues to provide its important community services. There are a number of ways in which you can help.

The La Jolla Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs recently joined forces with LiveWell San Diego and concerned community members to form Friends of the Riford Center, which will organize events and fundraising opportunities to benefit the center. Funds are needed to support the center's health and wellness programs, nutrition and transportation services, computer resources and promotional efforts. Donations to any of these projects would be most welcome.

Volunteer opportunities also exist for those who are willing to share their time and talents with the Riford Center. If you can assist with light office work, donate cookies and snacks, work in the library or teach a class, please contact center director Lynda Hunt at (858) 459-0831.

The Council District One staff and I had the opportunity to lend a hand last year, when we spent several hours prepping the walls and windows of the center for painting. I was impressed by the great things Lynda and her small staff accomplish with such a modest budget.

Please help support this much-needed community resource in any way you can.